

Lecture 8: Rest in the Land, the Spiral of Judges, and No King in Israel

Introduction to Biblical Theology · Dr. Thomas Schreiner · The Master's Seminary · 22 minutes

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Before you watch

The land is given, the promises audited, and not one has failed. Yet Joshua ends with a warning, and Judges begins a long spiral: a generation that never knew the LORD, deliverers stranger than the enemies, Samson falling like the nation he embodied, and a refrain tolling through the final chapters: no king in Israel. Listen for how rest can be real and still not final, and why every page now aches for a throne.

The lecture, section by section

1. Rest in the land

Joshua announces the land promises fulfilled in an initial way, and with them a deeper theme: rest. The rest of the seventh creation day comes to roost in the land, in God's presence, in the place God gives his people.

2. The LORD wins the victories

Joshua's battles preach grace, sovereignty, and power. As strategy, marching around a fortified city for a week would be laughable; as theology it is the whole point. The victory is the LORD's, battle after battle, and Israel receives what it could never take.

3. The commander of the LORD's army

Before Jericho, Joshua meets a man with a drawn sword and asks the natural question: are you for us or for our enemies? Neither, he answers; I have come as commander of the LORD's army. Joshua falls on his face, and is told, like Moses, to remove his sandals. The LORD leads his own war. Schreiner turns it pastorally: leaders are servants, and the reminder lands exactly where pride enters, at the top.

4. Obedience still matters

Grace does not retire obedience. Israel must be circumcised, bearing the covenant sign, before taking the land; Achan's sin turns victory into rout; and the book closes in covenant renewal at Shechem.

5. Optimism, with clouds

Joshua is the Bible's most optimistic book, and it will not let the reader relax. Not all the inhabitants are driven out, and at the covenant renewal Joshua tells the people, of all things: you are not able to serve the LORD. At the summit of triumph, a dark and clarifying word.

6. Every promise kept, and yet

Joshua 21 is the audit: the LORD gave all the land he swore, gave rest on every side, and not one word of all his good promises failed. From the author's standpoint the land promise is fulfilled. And yet: Canaanites remain, and the blessing is not yet worldwide. Fulfilled, Schreiner says, but not the complete fullness: yes, and more to come.

7. Judges: Israel needs a king

What is Judges about? Israel spiraling downward, progressively deteriorating, and thereby crying out on every page for the king promised in Genesis 49 and Numbers 24. Schreiner is struck that some scholars deny the kingship theme; he finds it written across the whole book. Judges opens on an optimistic note and, in his phrase, crashes with a thud.

8. Living among becomes living like

Israel failed to drive out the Canaanites, and the pattern followed: live among the Canaanites long enough and you begin to live like them. Schreiner presses it home: secular thinking invades churches the same way, and he names his chosen example plainly, a divorce culture in which believers divorce and remarry apart from biblical grounds and congregations say nothing. Canaanite thinking, inside the camp.

9. A generation that did not know the LORD

Judges 2 records the quiet catastrophe beneath all the loud ones: a generation arose that knew neither the LORD nor the works he had done for Israel. The baton of faith was not passed, and passing it is the task set before every generation since, one household and one child at a time. Israel was in the land, but not in the LORD.

10. The cycle and the unlikely saviors

So the cycle turns: Israel disobeys, a foreign power oppresses, the people cry out, and the LORD raises a deliverer. The word judge here means savior and ruler far more than magistrate, and the deliverers are deliberately unlikely: left-handed Ehud, Deborah a woman in a man's world, fearful Gideon. God delivers through instruments no one would choose, so no one mistakes whose the deliverance is.

11. Samson: the nation in one man

Samson is Israel's story compressed into a single life: supernatural in origin, set apart from the womb, given a holy vocation, and forever chasing what he was made to refuse. Israel falls for foreign gods the way Samson falls for foreign women, as Barry Webb puts it. And yet the LORD does not abandon him, which is the message of the whole book. Hebrews counts Samson among the faithful, and the narrative agrees: his hair begins to grow again, his strength was always the LORD's and never the hair's, and he dies calling on God in faith. As God did not abandon Samson, he did not abandon Israel.

12. No king in Israel

Four times the narrator tolls his refrain, and with it he ends the book: in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him. Repetition at the joints and at the close is how narrative preaches. The final chapters show what the refrain means: Dan destroys a peaceful town in defiance of Deuteronomy 20, the idolatrous young Levite turns out to be Moses' own great-grandson, and the outrage at Gibeah retells Sodom inside Israel. Hundreds of years on, the offspring hold the land and cannot even hold themselves. The problem now has a name: no king.

13. Ruth, and a word on the order of the canon

Turning to Ruth, Schreiner pauses over canon order. Some fine biblical theologians argue the Hebrew ordering of the books is the interpretive key; with Brevard Childs, he judges the manuscript evidence too varied to fix one order, so both the Hebrew and the familiar order are legitimate for biblical theology. Ruth proves the point by teaching in either seat: after Proverbs, she is the noble woman of Proverbs 31 embodied; after Judges, she is the bright spot in a dark age, and the signal that the king is coming.

Scripture in this lecture

Joshua 5, 7, 21, 24; Judges 2, 3, 4, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21; Ruth 1; Genesis 49; Numbers 24; Deuteronomy 20; Proverbs 31; Hebrews 11

Key terms

Rest

The seventh-day theme landing in Joshua: rest in the land, in God's presence, in the place he gives.

Fulfilled, yet not final

Joshua 21's verdict that no good promise failed, standing beside remaining Canaanites and a blessing not yet worldwide.

The commander of the LORD's army

The figure before Jericho who is on neither side: the LORD leads his own war, and even Joshua is servant, not sovereign.

The Judges cycle

Sin, oppression, crying out, deliverance, and again: a nation spiraling downward.

Judges as saviors

The word carries deliverance and rule, not courtroom procedure: God raising unlikely rescuers so the glory is unmistakably his.

No king in Israel

The book's tolling refrain: everyone did what was right in his own eyes: the ache that Genesis 49 and Numbers 24 exist to answer.

Comprehension check

Circle your answers, then check them against the key on the last page.

1. Where does the creation theme of rest come to roost in Joshua?

- A. In the Sabbath laws alone
- B. In the ark of the covenant
- C. In the land God gives: rest on every side, in his presence
- D. In the tabernacle furniture

2. What is the point of Jericho's strange battle plan?
 - A. The victory is the LORD's, not Israel's strategy
 - B. Walls fall to marching rhythm
 - C. Israel's army was too small to fight
 - D. To frighten the defenders into surrender
3. When Joshua asks the man with the drawn sword whose side he is on, the answer is what?
 - A. Israel's
 - B. Jericho's
 - C. Whichever side obeys
 - D. Neither: he has come as commander of the LORD's army
4. What does Joshua say to the people at the covenant renewal?
 - A. The land is now secure forever
 - B. You are not able to serve the LORD
 - C. Choose any gods you wish
 - D. Build a temple at Shechem
5. How does Joshua 21 assess God's promises?
 - A. Not one good promise failed, though the complete fullness is still ahead
 - B. Most of the promises failed
 - C. The promises were postponed until David
 - D. Joshua cannot say
6. What is the book of Judges about, in one line?
 - A. Israel's golden age
 - B. Courtroom procedure in early Israel
 - C. Israel spiraling downward, showing its need of a king
 - D. The conquest of Canaan completed
7. What happens when Israel lives among the Canaanites?
 - A. It converts them
 - B. It soon begins to live like them
 - C. Nothing changes on either side
 - D. They trade peacefully ever after
8. What failure does Judges 2 record about the next generation?
 - A. They forgot Hebrew
 - B. They lost the land records
 - C. They intermarried with Egypt
 - D. They knew neither the LORD nor his works: the faith was not passed on

9. The word translated judges chiefly means what?
 - A. Deliverers, saviors who also ruled
 - B. Courtroom magistrates
 - C. Priests
 - D. Scribes of the law
10. How does the lecture defend Hebrews' claim that Samson had faith?
 - A. Hebrews corrects the book of Judges
 - B. Samson's strength was natural
 - C. The narrative agrees: his hair grows again, his strength is the LORD's, and he dies calling on God
 - D. It cannot be defended
11. What refrain closes the book of Judges?
 - A. And the land had rest forty years
 - B. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what seemed right to him
 - C. Hear, O Israel
 - D. The LORD reigns forever
12. What does Schreiner conclude about the order of the Old Testament canon?
 - A. Only the Hebrew order is inspired
 - B. Only the Greek order is inspired
 - C. The order carries no meaning at all
 - D. Both orders are legitimate, and Ruth teaches richly in either place

Talk it over

1. Joshua was reminded before his greatest victory that he was servant, not sovereign. Where in your responsibilities, home, work, or church, do you most need the commander's answer: neither?
2. Live among the Canaanites long enough and you begin to live like them. Where has the surrounding culture's thinking quietly become normal in your household, and what would repentance look like there?
3. A whole generation arose that did not know the LORD or his works. What, concretely, are you doing this month so that the next generation in your house knows both?

One verse to carry

Joshua 21:45, the bookkeeping of grace: not one good promise the LORD made to the house of Israel failed; every one came true.

Go further

Barry Webb's work on Judges stands behind the lecture's reading of Samson, and Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty*, commended in Lecture 7, frames the whole storyline.

Lecture 8 Comprehension Check

1. C. In the land God gives: rest on every side, in his presence (*outline section 1*)
2. A. The victory is the LORD's, not Israel's strategy (*outline section 2*)
3. D. Neither: he has come as commander of the LORD's army (*outline section 3*)
4. B. You are not able to serve the LORD (*outline section 5*)
5. A. Not one good promise failed, though the complete fullness is still ahead (*outline section 6*)
6. C. Israel spiraling downward, showing its need of a king (*outline section 7*)
7. B. It soon begins to live like them (*outline section 8*)
8. D. They knew neither the LORD nor his works: the faith was not passed on (*outline section 9*)
9. A. Deliverers, saviors who also ruled (*outline section 10*)
10. C. The narrative agrees: his hair grows again, his strength is the LORD's, and he dies calling on God (*outline section 11*)
11. B. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what seemed right to him (*outline section 12*)
12. D. Both orders are legitimate, and Ruth teaches richly in either place (*outline section 13*)